

day, the Germans could not.

Having survived this ordeal, it seems that Percy's Battalion was then moved to the area around Ypres. The Germans had also planned several smaller attacks as part of their offensive and one of these was an attempt to capture Ypres and in so doing demoralize British forces.

This started with a bombardment on 7th April, and on 11th April Percy's division was called forward to form a defensive line near Estaires through which retreating British and Portuguese troops could withdraw. The next day, the Germans threw in all their reserves to try to take Hazebrouck, and it was on this day that Percy sustained a gunshot wound in the region of his sacrum. Suffering from 'bladder symptoms,' he would initially have been treated at a casualty clearing station before he was moved to the 14th General Hospital at Wimereux.



Wimereux Hospital

The coastal resort of Wimereux had been a small hamlet of only 10 families in 1810, but had grown into a major tourist attrac-

tion by the outbreak of World War I, and was known as the Nice du Nord. There were over 800 villas, and around 50 hotels and guest houses in the town, some of which were requisitioned and became military hospitals.

By 23rd April, Percy's wound was badly infected and he was brought back to England and admitted to King George Military Hospital, in London. The bullet showed up on X ray lying just in front of his sacrum with the point embedded in the bone. A telegram was sent on 3rd May saying that he was dangerously ill and he died at 7.30am the next morning from secondary meningitis. The record notes that relatives were with him at the end and his body was sent home for burial in Flaxley Churchyard.



Percy's grave

He was just 20 years old.

He was awarded the British War medal and the Victory Medal and these were sent to his mother, Jane.

For further copies of this leaflet or if you have any information to add, please contact Di Landon on 01452 760531

Westbury Remembers

Part 22 - Percy Young

Written by Di Landon
and sponsored by

Westbury-on-Severn Parish Council



A stained glass window in the Church of St Mary the Virgin in Flaxley honours five young men from the village who died in the First World War. One of these was Percy Young, and a roll of honour hanging on the church wall nearby, shows that a further 22 men, including four of Percy's brothers, had also enlisted. As the population of Flaxley at this time was probably little more than 250, it seems that nearly every family must have had someone fighting in this "war to end all wars."

Flaxley, now such a quiet and picturesque part of our parish, was once one of the most industrial areas of the Forest of Dean. There were several iron mines in the area during the 19th century and Percy's father, Isaiah, and uncle, Esau, both worked in them. The 1861 census shows that at the age of 12 years, Esau was already working as a miner and Isaiah, who was 3 years younger, may well have

started work in the mine at a similar age. They lived at Cliff View in Dirty Lane (now New Road) which had been their family home for many years. Happily the house remains in the family, and is now occupied by the descendants of Percy's brother, Arthur. Percy's grandparents obviously had a liking for biblical names, for as well as Isaiah and Esau, they had children named Joseph, Joshua, Sarah and Samuel.

In 1876, Isaiah married Jane Bellamy, who was born and bred in Westbury. They went on to have 12 children between 1878 and 1898, when Percy, their youngest, was born. The 1911 census shows that all of them survived childhood, which was unusual for a family of that size at that time, and by 1911 all but three of the children had left home. The iron mines in Flaxley had closed in 1899 and Isaiah



was by then employed as a general labourer.

Percy's older siblings would have attended Flaxley School but this closed in 1901 and so it is more likely that he went to Blaisdon School. In 1911 his brother Frank was working as a gardener at Flaxley Abbey while Arthur was a bakery assistant.

When Percy left school he worked as a farm labourer until 31st Jan 1917, when he enlisted in the Gloucestershire Regiment. Conscriptio had been introduced in January 1916 for single men of 18, but Percy was not conscripted at that time. Like many others, his health may not have been considered

good enough. His service record shows that he was 5ft 6" tall and weighed 140lb.

For Percy, the first few months of his service were spent at Clipstone Camp, near Mansfield This was the largest of the training camps built for the recruits of Kitchener's New Army, and it could accommodate over 30,000 men, housed in wooden huts. His record shows that while there, he overstayed his pass one night from midnight until 8.30pm the following day, for which he was confined to barracks for two days and deprived of four day's pay. It

appears that the soldiers were well looked after in the towns and villages near the camp, and the local parish birth registers show that the local girls often made them very welcome indeed!

Like Alfred Bennett (see leaflet 19) and Edward Warren (leaflet 20), Percy Young was selected for the Machine Gun Corps, which he joined in April 1917. After training, he landed in Boulogne on 20th June 1917 and was based about 15 miles away at Camiers.

At the beginning of 1917, the British and French were still searching for a way to achieve a breakthrough on the Western Front. The battles on the Somme and at Verdun in 1916

had consumed enormous quantities of resources while achieving virtually no strategic gains. Containing these Anglo-French attacks had been very costly for Germany and this cost was thought likely to increase in 1917, so the German commanders decided on a defensive strategy on the Western Front for that year. This led to a stalemate and reinforced the French and British commanders' belief that they needed a breakthrough.

On 9th July 1917, Percy joined the 93 Machine Gun Company at



Clipstone Camp in 1915



German troops marching forward in preparation for Operation Michael in March 1918

Roclincourt and after two weeks of physical training, gas mask drill and gun drill, interspersed with church parades, inspections, brigade sports and digging emplacements, the 93 Machine Gun Company was 'in the line' at Petit Vimy, near Arras. Their war diary shows that although they were subjected to considerable enemy artillery fire, they escaped without casualties, and after a few weeks they were relieved and able to have baths and clean clothes before resuming the routine of drills and parades.

Further spells in the trenches in August and September were also fairly uneventful and it was not until October that they sustained their first casualty when they were attacked with gas, machine gun and artillery fire. In November they saw two of their men "laid out" by a stray shell, and they spent Christmas 1917 in the trenches under fire from the enemy's artillery. The stalemate continued, but by January 1918 the trenches were in an appalling state and living conditions must have been ghastly.

On 21st February, Percy's company became part of the newly

formed 31st Battalion, and the 93 Machine Gun Company war diary was closed. Unfortunately I have been unable to find the diary for the 31st Battalion but they were part of the 31st Division which was involved in the heavy fighting that ensued when the stalemate of 1917 came to an end on 21st March 1918 with the start of Operation Michael.

This was a major German military offensive that was launched from the Hindenburg line in the vicinity of Saint-Quentin in France. Its aim was to break through the Allied lines and drive them into the sea. The Germans succeeded in advancing nearly forty miles, but much of the captured ground was a shell-torn wilderness left by the 1916 Battle of the

Somme. Their advance gradually came to a halt as their supply lines became stretched by the difficult terrain. Heavy casualties had been sustained on both sides but while the Allies were able to replace their losses, with fresh troops being shipped over from Britain in their tens of thousands and munitions factories churning out new artillery and machine guns night and